

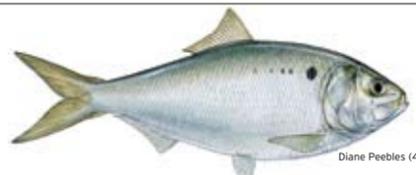
Live-Bait 21 Club

A Catalog of 21 Popular Live Baits around the World

By Doug Olander

While just about anything alive and wiggling in the right place at the right time can elicit a feeding response, coastal anglers in just about every location the world over have found certain species of indigenous baitfishes that most consistently provoke that desired response. These pages offer a unique comparative profile of 21 of the world's most popular livebaits. Granted, there's no shortage of other hot-bait species that space precludes listing, but most of the major go-to livebaits are here. ("Ratings" note: A=excellent; B=good; C=fair/adequate; the "Durability" rating pertains primarily to longevity in a livewell.)

United States



Diane Peebles (4)

(*Brevoortia patronus*, aka pogey)

Gulf Menhaden

Family: Herrings (Clupeidae)
Size: 8 to 10 inches commonly, though can grow to more than a foot
Distribution: Gulf of Mexico
Habitat: Inshore and (in winter) offshore
How caught: Cast nets
Local importance: Throughout the Gulf
Target game fish: Smoker king mackerel, though everything eats 'em
How fished: Often variously hooked through mouth or dorsal area; kingfish anglers may add a treble stinger
Comments: One of oiliest of forage fishes, also great for chunking to bring game fish within casting range; supports a huge commercial seine fishery
Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: B
Durability: B



(*Hemiramphus brasiliensis*)

Ballyhoo

Family: Halfbeaks (Hemiramphidae)
Size: 10 to 12 inches commonly; horse ballyhoo may reach nearly 18
Distribution: Northern Atlantic in warm waters
Habitat: Nearshore shallow reefs and

sea-grass beds, as well as around structure in deeper waters

How caught: Cast nets or tiny, baited gold hooks, sometimes under a small float
Local importance: Limited as live bait; tremendously popular fresh or frozen
Target game fish: Sailfish and other blue-water pelagics
How fished: More often rigged (variously, with wire and mono) for trolling but can be drifted or kite-fished with thin-gauge hooks
Comments: Very similar species found in tropical seas around the world; a popular baitfish in many areas. The group uses the tail's elongate lower lobe to skip along the surface for long distances to escape predators. Small schools can be enticed to a boat's transom with fine menhaden chum.
Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: B
Durability: C



(*Harengula jaguana*, aka pilchard or white bait)

Scaled Sardine

Family: Herrings (Clupeidae)
Size: 4 to 6 inches; may reach 7 to 8 inches
Distribution: Coastally along south-eastern United States to Brazil, including Caribbean islands
Habitat: Inshore estuaries and bays and shallow reefs
How caught: Cast nets, sabikis
Local importance: Popular throughout the Southeast
Target game fish: Snook inshore; kings offshore (but effective for nearly any

predator with fins)

How fished: Varies; thin/light-wire hooks often preferable to avoid impeding natural swimming action
Comments: Often easily caught in large numbers; pilchards popular as "live chum" to draw fish out of mangroves
Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: A
Durability: A



Noel Burkhead / USGS / Gainesville, FL

(*Fundulus grandis*, aka bull minnow, mud minnow, cocahoe)

Gulf Killifish

Family: Killifishes (Cyprinodontidae)
Size: 4 inches; may reach 6 to 7
Distribution: Northeast Florida through the northern Gulf of Mexico
Habitat: Estuarial, especially in brackish shallows
How caught: Baited traps (also sold by bait shops in some areas)
Local importance: Northern Gulf
Target game fish: Flounder, redfish, trout
How fished: Single small hook through lips or back; also fished on a lead-head jig, hooked through the mouth
Comments: Other, similar killifishes may be labeled bull minnows and cocahoes also; all species fished similarly — very popular in mid-Atlantic states for summer flounder. Killifishes can tolerate wide salinity and temperature ranges.
Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: C
Durability: A



(*Mugil cephalis*, aka black mullet)

Striped Mullet

Family: Mullet (Mugilidae)
Size: From finger-mullet size of a few inches to mature 10- to 14-inches; reportedly reaches 3 feet in length

Distribution: Throughout the world; there are a great many species of mullet — this is but one; however, it is one of the most wide-ranging
Habitat: Shallow intertidal estuaries, lower rivers; often favoring muddy bays; their annual coastal migrations form major feeding events for predators
How caught: Cast nets
Local importance: A favored baitfish in many areas where they occur; finger mullet often eagerly sought as live baits by inshore anglers
Target game fish: Tarpon, snook, red drum, kingfish, jack crevalle
How fished: As live bait, usually with a single hook through the back, head or belly
Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: B
Durability: B



Diane Peebles (3)

(*Lagodon rhomboides*)

Pinfish

Family: Porgies (Sparidae)
Size: 3 or 4 inches to at least 6, typically; may reach a foot more in length
Distribution: Southeastern United States, around the entire Gulf of Mexico and south to Yucatan Peninsula, plus Cuba and nearby Caribbean Islands
Habitat: Shallow bays, estuaries, eel-grass beds
How caught: Cast nets, sabiki rigs or tiny bait-tipped hooks
Local importance: Widespread if somewhat limited use in Florida and west to Texas
Target game fish: Seatrout, redfish, cobia, grouper, snapper, various jacks
How fished: Typically with a single circle or J hook through the head or (especially in shallow, grassy areas) back
Comments: Handle with care; dorsal, anal and pelvic fins are well armed with needle-sharp spines on the aptly named pinfish
Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: A
Durability: A



Montrose Settlements Restoration Program / Cabrillo Marine Aquarium

(*Sardinops sagax*)

Pacific Sardine

Family: Herrings (Clupeidae)
Size: Most often 4 to 8 inches; can get larger
Distribution: Common to the entire California coast and down into Baja, occasionally farther north and south
Habitat: Up and down the coast, near-shore, off kelp beds

How caught: Seldom caught, mostly bought — from large bait receivers (typically priced at \$20 to \$25 per scoop — enough for two anglers for a day)
Local importance: A mainstay of the South Coast partyboat fishery and private boaters as well
Target game fish: Kelp bass, yellowtail, California halibut, albacore and yellowfin tuna, dorado
How fished: Lightest possible hooks, often through the "collarbone" or nose but variously in the back or belly; often fly-lined with no weight or fished with light rubber-core sinkers
Comments: Fragile baits, best with minimal handling, gentle casting; most anglers switch out baits frequently to ensure natural movement; select baits light green in color and slimy to touch, say experts — avoid blue-backed fish with red noses
Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: A (as long as a bait receiver isn't far off)
Durability: B (in bait tank but more like C on the hook)



Duane Raver / USFWS

(*Anguilla rostrata*)

American Eel

Family: Freshwater eels (Anguillidae)
Size: Anglers generally use them 12 to 18 inches, but common to 3 feet and reputedly reach 5
Distribution: All of eastern North America and south to northernmost South America
Habitat: Adults live in fresh or brackish waters but (being catadromous) return in winters to salt water to spawn
How caught: Traps (especially baited with crushed crab) or small, baited hooks (most often, anglers purchase live eels)
Local importance: A favorite among Gulf and Southeast cobia anglers and among Northeast and mid-Atlantic striper fishermen
Target game fish: As above, cobia and stripers; also used for bluefin and other species
How fished: For stripers, hooked through the lips on weighted (often fish-finder) rigs from anchored or drifting boats or trolled slowly; cobia fishermen like to sight-cast them directly to cobia on top
Comments: Slimy, squirmy live eels almost defy handling; most anglers either use sand to get a grip or put eels on ice to make them temporarily lethargic. Young eels live and feed in fresh water for 10 to 20 or more years before they become adults and return to the sea.
Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: B (or A if you just buy the darn things)
Durability: A



(*Caranx crysos*, aka hardtail)

Blue Runner

Family: Jacks, trevallies (Carangidae)
Size: Commonly a pound or 2; may reach 5 or more
Distribution: Coastal waters on both sides of the Atlantic; in the western Atlantic from the Northeast to Brazil
Habitat: From shallow bays and inshore waters to offshore, particularly around sargassum and flotsam
How caught: Sabiki rigs or small baited hooks (especially if schools chummed to the boat) or trolling small squids
Local importance: One of more popular live baits in the Gulf of Mexico and the southern Eastern Seaboard
Target game fish: You name it — but particularly smoker king mackerel and swordfish
How fished: Great, hardy baits under the kite or trolled slowly on top or behind a sinker or on a downrigger; also dropped deep
Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: A
Durability: A



(*Opisthonema oglinum*, aka threadfin)

Atlantic Thread Herring

Family: Herrings (Clupeidae)
Size: Can reach 12 inches; commonly 5 to 9 inches
Distribution: Western Atlantic from the U.S. Northeast to Brazil, including the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Islands
Habitat: Shallow coastal waters, generally in 30 feet or less
How caught: Cast nets, sabikis
Local importance: A key baitfish along most of U.S. southeast coast
Target game fish: Most game fish — including sails, kings, grouper/snapper offshore, snook and tarpon inshore
How fished: Mostly free-lined on top of or below a sliding-sinker rig for deeper species (or on kites when conditions are calm since they're pretty light otherwise)
Comments: Not much that swims and eats other fish won't go for a live threadie
Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: B
Durability: C

They're Alive!



Diane Peebles

(*Euthynnus alletteratus*, aka bonito, false albacore)

Little Tunny

Family: Tunas/mackerels (Scombridae)

Size: Schools of 1/2- to 1-pounders (ideal live-bait size) form large shoals, though tunny can exceed 25 pounds

Distribution: Throughout tropical and into temperate waters of the Atlantic and Mediterranean

Habitat: Typically at the surface or mid-depths as fast-moving schools in nearshore waters

How caught: Trolling tiny squids or at times drifting sabiki rigs

Local importance: Throughout its range, seldom a primary bait but important when available

Target game fish: Sailfish, wahoo, yellowfin tuna, marlin

How fished: Slow-trolled or, if not too large, fished beneath kites, usually bridle-rigged

Comments: Tuna tubes offer the best chance to keep liveys lively

Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: B
Durability: C



Roz Davis

(*Brevoortia tyrannus*, aka bunker)

Atlantic Menhaden

Family: Herrings (Clupeidae)

Size: 6 to 10 inches; sometimes much larger

Distribution: Western Atlantic, common from the Northeast to the lower mid-Atlantic states

Habitat: Near coastal; prefer deeper waters of bays and harbors

How caught: Cast nets, snag hooks

Local importance: Fundamentally important baitfish, live/fresh/frozen, from Maine to Carolinas

Target game fish: Bluefin tuna, striped bass, bluefish, weakfish

How fished: Bridled or hooked through nose, eyes or below dorsal; on tuna grounds, can be a great kite bait; essential for chunk or chum lines

Comments: Ecologically critical role as forage for predators such as striped bass and as filter feeders; support large commercial reduction fisheries (where local depletions may be occurring in the Chesapeake Bay)

Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: B
Durability: B

Australia



Diane Peebles

(*Selar crumenophthalmus*, aka goggle-eye)

Bigeye Scad

Family: Jacks, trevallies (Carangidae)

Size: 8 to 12 inches commonly; may grow to about twice that length

Distribution: Around the world, thriving in warm seas

Habitat: Clear coastal reefs

How caught: Sabiki rigs, often late at night around ships anchored just offshore and buoys or markers

Local importance: Southeast Florida — one of most coveted live baits

Target game fish: Sailfish as well as any large pelagics

How fished: Great kite baits, directly hooked or bridled with circle hooks

Comments: How much do south Florida anglers love their "gogs"? Enough to pay \$100/dozen during sailfish tournaments!

Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: B
Durability: A



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(*Trachurus novaezelandiae*, aka yakka, horse mackerel)

Yellowtail Scad

Family: Jacks/trevallies (Carangidae)

Size: Commonly 6 to 12 inches; may reach as much as 20

Distribution: Central/southern Australian waters, New Zealand, Southeast Asia and as far north as Japan

Habitat: Surface and midwater over reefy bottoms and in deeper water

How caught: Sabikis, small strip baits, bread, small lures/jigs

Local importance: A key live baitfish around most of southern Australia

Target game fish: Narrowbarred Spanish mackerel, tunas, mulloway (large drum), yellowtail, cobia, billfish

How fished: Hooked through nose, tail or dorsal fin

Comments: Found over most inshore and

offshore reefs and particularly around pylons and channel markers; respond well to chum

Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: A
Durability: B



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(*Scomber australasicus*, aka slimy)

Blue Mackerel

Family: Mackerels and tunas (Scombridae)

Size: Commonly 6 to 12 inches; may be as large as 20

Distribution: Throughout the Indo-Pacific, to the Red Sea/Persian Gulf, Japan, southern Australia/New Zealand and Mexico

Habitat: Surface and mid-depths in coastal and oceanic environments

How caught: Sabiki rigs, small strip baits, bread, small lures

Local importance: As for yellowtail scad

Target game fish: Nearly all predators, certainly including mackerels, tunas, kingfish, cobia, and great for billfish

How fished: Hooked through nose, tail or dorsal fin

Comments: Slimies are a robust and long-lived livey, particularly when hooked through the lips

Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: B
Durability: A

United Kingdom



Jón Baldur Hlíðberg

(*Hyperoplus lanceolatus*, aka launce)

Great Sandeel

Family: Sand lances (Ammodytidae)

Size: 6 to 12 inches

Distribution: Widespread throughout the South and West Coast of the United Kingdom

Habitat: Tide rips, particularly in the vicinity of sand banks

How caught: Mostly with small sabikis

Local importance: Off Hampshire/Devon/Cornwall/Wales and the Channel Islands

Target game fish: European bass, pollock, turbot and brill, occasionally tope

How fished: Usually on a long, flowing trace from a boat drifting over sand banks, through tide rips or over wrecks. Smaller eels are rigged with single hook near the mouth; two hooks fished in tandem are used for larger baits, the front hook near the head and the rear hook positioned just behind the dorsal.

Comments: When available, a deadly and highly effective bait. Eels are available in many coastal tackle shops.

Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: A (spring through early autumn)
Durability: B



Jón Baldur Hlíðberg

(*Scomber scombrus*, aka joey, when small)

Atlantic Mackerel

Family: Tunas/mackerels (Scombridae)

Size: 6 to 12 inches for live baits; larger mackerel may be used for tope or sharks

Distribution: Caught throughout the British Isles, spring through autumn (more abundant in the south and west)

Habitat: Both inshore and offshore, notably around tide races but anywhere later in the season

How caught: Sabikis and traditional mackerel feathers

Local importance: Popular with bass anglers fishing English Channel wrecks; throughout Wales and Channel Islands to waters north and west of France

Target game fish: European bass and tope

How fished: Drifted over wrecks, reefs or sandbanks on long leaders

Comments: Dawn and dusk and during high water (tide) are the most consistent times to catch fresh mackerel; shoals are often found by locating diving gannets

Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: A
Durability: C

South Africa



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(*Scomber japonicus*, aka mackerel)

Pacific Mackerel

Family: Tunas/mackerels (Scombridae)

Size: 4- to 12-inches are common; occasionally may reach 18

Distribution: Around southern Africa and Madagascar, plus most of the Indo-Pacific

Habitat: Around structure, particularly wrecks, but also reefs, from the shoreline to 50 fathoms

How caught: Sabikis or small, baited hooks

Local importance: Important species for live bait wherever anglers regularly fish blue water

Target game fish: All pelagics as well as larger bottomfish

How fished: Often rigged on wire for coua, or king mackerel, as narrowbarred Spanish mackerel are called here

Comments: Similar species found throughout the world's seas

Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: B
Durability: B



Diane Peebles

(*Pomatomus saltatrix*, aka shad or elf [South Africa], bluefish [U.S.], tailor [Australia])

Bluefish

Family: Pomatomidae

Size: 6 to 24 inches (those roughly in the smaller half of that range are used as liveys; bigger specimens as dead swim baits)

Distribution: Circumglobal in all tropical and temperate waters except the eastern Pacific

Habitat: Over inshore reefs as well as around structure in up to 40 fathoms of water, deep during the day and just under the surface at night

How caught: Sabikis for very small shad, but otherwise baited 2/0 with short wire leaders

Local importance: Commonly used as live bait in coastal waters around the country

Target game fish: A favorite bait for big mackerel, drifted or trolled in the tropical waters of South Africa's east coast; also for large bottomfish such as kob (large drum) or steenbras (monster pogies)

How fished: Trolled on a long wire leader with large single or treble hooks nicked through the flank and lead hook through the snout area or fished on bottom with a 9/0 hook through the snout or eyes

Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: A (but seasonal)

Durability: A

New Zealand



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(*Trachurus declivis*, aka jack mackerel)

Greenback Jack Mackerel

Family: Jacks/trevallies (Carangidae)

Size: 4 to 18 inches

Distribution: Around most of New Zealand and the southern half of Australia

Habitat: Smaller fish found inshore around reefs, islands harbors and coastline; larger ones offshore to 400 feet, from bottom to surface

How caught: Sabiki rigs (often tipped with bait), small baited hooks with split shot; respond to chum and lights at night

Local importance: Predominantly used off the North Island; most popular of live baitfish for Kiwis

Target game fish: Inshore — yellowtail (kingfish) plus snapper and john dory; offshore — yellowfin tuna plus striped marlin

How fished: Offshore, under a float, slow-trolled from a downrigger, deep-drifted on a weighted rig, pitch-baited; inshore, fished off a ledger (dropper) rig for large snappers and john dory

Comments: One of several similar species sharing these waters, including the popular scad known as koheru (*Decapterus koheru*)

Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: A
Durability: A



Diane Peebles

(*Arripis trutta*, aka salmon [Australia])

Kahawai

Family: Kahawais (Arripidae)

Size: 6 to 24 inches

Distribution: New Zealand, southern Australia

Habitat: All continental-shelf waters to about 300 feet, often in surface-feeding schools; frequents river mouths and estuaries into brackish water

How caught: Small lures cast or trolled (will strike a wide variety of lures, flies and baits from the bottom to the surface)

Local importance: A very popular live bait among New Zealand anglers

Target game fish: Yellowtail (kingfish) and, offshore, striped and black marlin, mako and other sharks

How fished: Inshore, often under a balloon float or drifted with a weighted line; offshore, bridle-rigged and trolled from the rod tip or a downrigger or used as a pitch bait

Comments: Historically, the widespread, robust kahawai have been a go-to bait for most New Zealand game-fish anglers; their numbers are now somewhat depleted by commercial purse seiners, but smaller kahawai are still widely available though are increasingly supplanted by jack mackerel and skipjack tuna (particularly for marlin offshore)

Ratings: Ease of locating/catching: B
Durability: A